Missouri River
Recovery Program

US Army Corps of Engineers

Quarterly newsletter
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LIFE ON THE RIVER: Partners in Recovery

By Mike Olson, Missouri River Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

For nearly 20 years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers spent most of our time focusing on the differences between our two agencies, such as agency cultures, missions, values and expertise. This parochial approach proved detrimental, not only to the physical and emotional health of individual engineers and biologists, but also to the ecological health of the nation's longest river – the Missouri.

A couple years ago, we tried a new approach, focusing on the common ground between our two agencies. The result was a dynamic, collaborative and focused group of problem solvers who are helping our other partners implement the largest river-restoration effort ever imagined.

One of our earliest (and ongoing) challenges was to find the best way to translate biological needs into engineering designs. Restoration biologists may describe a river's ecological "form and function," but unless that can be translated into cubic yards of sand or tons of rock, projects can be difficult to design and implement. Each agency has taken extra time to learn about the other, and with that has come an understanding and a growing appreciation and respect for each other's work. The end result is an improved project on the ground and in the water.

This partnership between the Service and Corps recognizes that considering different perspectives is an important component of building sustainable solutions to environmental problems. The shift in thinking has taken us years to embrace, but I think we're beginning to see the payoff of this approach.

Sincerely,

Mike Olson

Mike Olson

EMERGENT SANDBAR HABITAT Program

The Corps established the Emergent Sandbar Habitat (ESH) Program to develop and maintain Missouri River sandbar habitat for the endangered least tern and threatened piping plover. The sandbars of the Missouri River are important to the survival of these species because they provide ideal nesting and feeding habitat for the birds and their chicks.

The goal of the Emergent Sandbar Habitat Program is to provide sufficient sandbar habitat throughout the Missouri River system to allow self-sustaining populations of terns and plovers to thrive.

The Corps creates and maintains sandbar habitat before the annual arrival of terns and plovers using the following mechanical methods:

- Dredging
- Construction using heavy equipment
- Clearing vegetation from existing sandbars

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MEET MRERP

MRERP, or "Mr. Erp" as it is commonly known, is the Missouri River Ecosystem Restoration Plan that the Corps and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are working on as partners. This important study will identify ways to prioritize efforts for mitigation, recovery and restoration of the river.

MRERP will help determine what long-term actions are necessary to mitigate losses of aquatic and terrestrial habitat, to recover federally listed species under the Endangered Species Act, and to restore the ecosystem to prevent further declines among other native species. As authorized in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007, MRERP will work over the next several years to develop a long-range mitigation, recovery and restoration plan, incorporating significant input from the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee, Tribes, states, other federal agencies and the public. The final product will be a document that outlines a future vision for the river and the priorities and tools needed for implementation.

Currently, the MRERP team is identifying stakeholders and defining their roles and responsibilities in the development of this extensive plan.

PALLID STURGEON Hatchery Support

The pallid sturgeon is a bottom-dwelling fish native to the Missouri, Yellowstone and Mississippi rivers. Significant population decreases led the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the pallid sturgeon as an endangered species in 1990. Alterations to the Missouri and Mississippi rivers changed the rivers' natural features, which decreased the amount of habitat for pallid sturgeon and contributed to a decline in natural reproduction.

In order to recover the population, the Pallid Sturgeon Propagation and Population Augmentation Program uses six hatcheries throughout the states in the Missouri River basin to raise pallid sturgeon, which are introduced into the river. Raising pallid sturgeon in hatcheries and stocking them in the Missouri River are not solutions to saving the species but are essential components of species recovery. The hatcheries replenish missing age classes and strengthen the populations of existing fish while the ecosystem is restored.

A combination of factors greatly improved pallid sturgeon stocking efforts over the past eight years, including:

- Identified "hot spots" for capturing pallid sturgeon
- Refined collection, spawning and rearing techniques
- Improved hatchery facilities

Today, the collective efforts of the six hatcheries can raise nearly 60,000 pallid sturgeon annually, ensuring a healthy river for generations to come.

Multi-agency teams throughout the basin have conducted several successful sturgeon collection efforts this spring, including the first intensive collection effort in the Missouri River below Gavins Point Dam. The collected sturgeon were taken to one of the six project hatcheries to spawn and reproduce. The offspring will be raised at the hatcheries through the summer and possibly be introduced in the river in late summer or early fall.

SPRING PULSE Update

The annual spring pulse began March 25 at midnight and ran through March 31. This pulse affected river stages from Gavins Point Dam to Kansas City. Releases from several Kansas City District dams were reduced to offset the increased releases from Gavins Point Dam. The only other spring pulse conducted by the Corps was in May 2006.

More information on monitoring the effects of this pulse is available at www.moriverrecovery.org. Click on "Recovery Activities," then click on "Flow Modification."

CONNECT WITH MISSOURI RIVER RECOVERY ONLINE

Is your organization interested in Missouri River recovery? Add MRRP as a link on your organization's Web site! www.moriverrecovery.org

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EMERGENT SANDBAR HABITAT Program

Six ongoing construction projects have occurred during fall 2007 and spring 2008, including four in the section of the river below Gavins Point Dam to Ponca, Neb., and two in Lewis and Clark Lake in South Dakota. When complete, the sandbars will provide 207 acres of habitat below Gavins Point Dam and 227 acres of habitat in Lewis and Clark Lake. Most of this habitat will be available for birds for the 2008 nesting season. The remaining construction projects will be completed in the fall, and that habitat will be available for the 2009 nesting season.

The mission of the Missouri River Recovery Program is to implement actions to accomplish Missouri River ecosystem recovery goals in coordination and collaboration with agency partners and stakeholders. The vision of the program is to create a sustainable ecosystem supporting thriving populations of native species while providing for current social and economic values.

For more information on the Missouri River Recovery Program, please visit www.moriverrecovery.org.

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